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FYI

### Groups Want Stronger Response to Drinking Water Contamination

By Natural Resources Defense Council

September 27, 2017

Newark's drinking water lead levels are among the highest recorded by a large water system in the United States in recent years, and not enough is being done to respond to the water crisis, according to a coalition of local and national organizations. Efforts by the groups to secure greater transparency, including a public meeting to discuss plans to address the lead contamination with Mayor Ras J. Baraka and officials at the Department of Water and Sewer Utilities, have failed.

Newark's lead levels measure approximately the same level as found by independent researchers in Flint, Mich., in the late summer 2015, when that city was not using proper chemical treatment to reduce lead contamination in its water.

"The city of Newark has been slow to widely release pertinent information about the real danger of lead in our drinking water and has yet to inform the public of the specific locations where lead pipes were found. This lack of transparency is concerning, if not alarming," said Newark resident, Melissa Miles, an Environmental Justice Organizer with the Ironbound Community Corporation. "I find it unacceptable that the city is fast-tracking development while slow to comprehensively address life-threatening infrastructure issues like this one."

Eleven groups sent a letter to Mayor Baraka and Andrea Hall Adebowale, the Director of the Department of Water and Sewer Utilities, on September 13, 2017, stating that the city has failed to respond comprehensively to lead contamination of its drinking water. In July 2017, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection issued a notice of non-compliance to Newark, indicating that the city exceeded the federal action level for lead in drinking water, rising to 27 parts per billion. That is nearly twice the federal action level for lead, set at 15 parts per billion by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. There is no safe level of lead exposure.

"It comes as no surprise that the city's whole drinking water system faces similar challenges as Newark Public Schools," stated Amy Goldsmith, the New Jersey State Director for Clean Water Action. "Drinking water matters no matter where you turn on the tap. Putting drinking water first is a public health imperative. Clean Water Action is eager to work in the city to address this problem." "There's no government duty more important than supplying safe drinking water. High levels of lead in city tap water is a serious violation of the public trust. It's urgent that Newark do more to ensure that when kids take a drink of water in their home, they aren't sipping toxic lead," said Erik Olson, Director of the Health Program for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The groups moved to make the letter public after receiving no response to the September 13th letter, requesting additional information about the city's proposed action plan for addressing lead contamination in Newark's drinking water. Specifically, the groups asked Newark to address the critical situation more proactively by immediately taking the top three following actions:

- Fully inform all Newark residents about the potential risks posed by lead in their drinking water, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, young children, and pregnant people, and plainly explain the protective measures people should take for themselves and their families.
- Provide residents with more detailed information regarding low- or no-cost programs for getting their families and children seen by a doctor or tested for lead.
- Be fully transparent about the location of lead service lines and lead sampling sites by providing a city-wide map or description of lead service line locations, as well as a map or description of all lead sample site locations.

The toxic effects of lead can impact every system in the body, particularly the developing brains of young children. It can also contribute to high blood pressure and other health problems in adults. Even low levels of lead in the blood have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement, effects that are irreversible.

Unfortunately, Newark is not alone in violating the federal lead drinking water standard. Across the nation, about 4 million people were served by community water systems in 2015 that exceeded EPA's action level for lead in drinking water. NRDC is currently analyzing more recent national lead data.

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